4: Caravan & Caravan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

It houses several collections especially relevant to island residents, including the Esau Jenkins papers. In 1987 we placed more than sixty hours of recorded material, along with prints of Robert Yellin's masterful photographs at the center. We wanted people from the islands, as well as scholars, to have access to this material.

In 1963 Esau Jenkins told us:

> Now some of us, because we can read a little bit more, forget about the place we came from and some of the songs which help us go on. And when older folks sang those songs, it helped them realize they're trusting in God and reaching for a better day. We certainly wouldn't want the children to get away from it. We should cherish it, we should preserve it and keep it. . . .
>
> Now if we hide those sweet songs and try to get away from what we came from, what will we tell our children about the achievement we have made and the distance we have come?

In 1988 we noticed a plaque in the office of Bill Jenkins, Esau's oldest son and the administrator of the Sea Island Comprehensive Health Care Corporation:*

> A people who have not the pride to record their history will not long have the virtues to make history worth recording: and no people who are indifferent to their past need hope to make their future great.

There really is treasure here—honey in the rock. Our hope is that it will always be a part of the islands and a source of strength to island people as they struggle with the pressures and challenges of the present and the future.

*The authors' royalties from the Brown Thrasher edition of *Ain't You Got a Right to the Tree of Life?* are going to the Tree of Life Fund administered by the Comprehensive Health Care Corporation in support of cultural activities in the community.

(p. xvi-A)

8: Smith Q-4,5 (no date) 1926
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

533 mic, plaintive and beautiful. And sometimes the words themselves, at least the leading phrases, possess a naive appeal and essential poetic power.

533 533 539 Here are some of the most characteristic:

See God's Angel comin' down
To see Gawd's bleedin' Lam'.

Dark cloud risin', it looks like rain,
The sun drawin' water from Emanuel's veins,
(Wheel, wheel, wheel, O wheel my Lord.)

I want to die easy when I die.

Looka how dey done muh Lawd;
(Never spoke a mumblin' word,
Mumblin' word.)

I ain't gwine grief muh Lawd no mo'.

Oh de blood done sign mah name.

When I git in heben in my elbow chair,
Then I will rock like angel rock,
(T'ank Gawd I git obuh Jerdan.)

Jesus, when dis whole worl' on fire.

O Death, ain't you gots no shame?

I know moon-rise, I know star-rise,
Lay dis body down.
I walk in de moonlight, I walk in de starlight,
To lay dis body down.
I'll walk in de grave-yard, I'll walk through de
grave-yard,
To lay dis body down.
I'll lie in de grave and stretch out my arms;
Lay dis body down.
I go to judgment in de evenin' of de day,
When I lay dis body down;
And my soul and your soul will meet in de day
When I lay dis body down.

533 178 814 In particular, the low-country spirituals have been fortunate in having two distinctly preservative influences exerted on them. The first is the Charleston Society for the Preservation of Spirituals, an organization composed of the leading men and women of Charleston, all of whom

8: Smith Q-4,5 (no date) 1926
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533 belong in the plantation tradition. They have studied the
198 spirituals long and carefully at first hand, have learned
•814 them orally from groups of Negro plantation singers, and sing them seriously, feelingly, and sympathetically. Students of Negro music who know the facts are unanimous in the opinion that their rendition is accurate, dignified, and artistic."

533 The second influence came from a movement to get the
178 Negroes themselves to see the racial importance and native
517 worth of the spirituals and hence to continue to sing them, instead of discarding them as something vaguely to be ashamed of, in favor of printed collections of the white race.

[871] This influence has been particularly effective on St. Helena Island, through the instrumentality of the Penn Normal, Industrial and Agricultural School, which has exerted an extensive influence on the large Negro population of that island." In regard to the spirituals, the most important result, next to the continued singing of the spirituals by the island Negroes, is the recent publication of the words and music of 113 of the finest low-country spirituals."

533 This is the work of N. G. J. Ballanta, himself a Negro from Sierra Leone. Possessing as he does both musical scholarship and a native African background, he is unusu-

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[171] "Following are two interesting opinions on the subject of the white people's singing of spirituals. The latter opinion is the more accurate: "Carl Van Vechten writing in *Vanity Fair* about these songs declared it as his opinion that white singers cannot sing them, and that women, with few exceptions, should not attempt to sing them at all. . . . . I agree that white singers are, naturally, prone to go to either of two extremes: to attempt to render a Spiritual as though it were a Brahm's song, or to assume a 'Negro unctuousness' that is obviously false, and painfully so. I think white singers, concert singers, can sing Spirituals—if they *feel* them." Johnson, *The Book of American Negro Spirituals*, pp. 29, 29.

Compare the remark of a Negro woman quoted by Miss McKim (*Slave Songs of the United States*, XXIII) concerning how a spiritual should be sung: "It can't be sung widout a *full heart and a troubled spernit*."

[162] "St. Helena has a population of approximately 6,000 Negroes and 60 white people. The Penn School, founded during the War Between the States, was the first school for Negroes in the South supported by Northern funds. It has been brought to a high degree of efficiency by Miss Rossa B. Cooley, who went there in 1903. It dominates the island settlement and has had a tremendous influence upon it, so much so that the St. Helena Negroes are considerably above their racial average in most ways.

"*St. Helena Island Spirituals*, G. Schirmer, Inc., 1925.